



VIETNAM AUSTRALIA FORUM REMARKS
HO CHI MINH NATIONAL ACADEMY OF POLITICS, HANOI
WEDNESDAY 28 AUGUST 2024

I would like to acknowledge politburo member and the President of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, the Honourable Professor Nguyen Xuan Thang.

The relationship between our two countries is based on greater than 50 years of cooperation, respect, and strategic trust.

And the future of our two countries is intertwined.

Australia and Vietnam have built strong bridges together. This is both a metaphor and a practical way to get from one side to another. Through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will build bigger and stronger bridges to foster a relationship that is complementary, dynamic and growing.

The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership announced by our Prime Ministers' earlier this year reflects our alignment on shared priorities and shared ambition across a wide-range of fields – from officials, business and in our people-to-people links.

I look forward to welcoming Madame Nguyen Thi Thanh in September. As Vietnam will be going in to, autumn, it will be spring in Australia. Spring

represents rejuvenation and new beginnings. I look forward to fruitful discussions with Madame Thanh.

The Vietnam Australia Centre is an excellent symbol of our close ties. It was one year ago this month that Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong shared the stage with Professor Thang at the inaugural Vietnam Australia Centre Forum.

I am honoured to be at the second.

It is striking that there are more than 300,000 Australians of Vietnamese heritage living in towns big and small across Australia which helps foster understanding of our shared history and culture.

Also, more than 33,000 Vietnamese are studying at Australian institutions. Education and our knowledge exchange is a cornerstone of our relationship and our partnership with the Academy is a shining example of where our shared objectives converge.

The Vietnam Australia Centre allows us to share meaningful knowledge exchange and expertise and seeks to tackle common challenges – These are becoming more complex as are our responses – from the conflict in Ukraine to the crisis in Gaza.

And with the issues we see closer to home in the Indo-Pacific, where the region continues to face complex policy decisions.

Of course, global issues have local effects, and our leaders need to be able to grapple with these. The pace of change is a challenge too – from needing action now in response to climate change, navigating constantly evolving changes in the global economy, to harnessing digital transformation and emerging technologies such as AI.

Australia is proud that through the Vietnam Australia Centre we are supporting each other to face these modern challenges.

These challenges need a focus on a less frequently spoken about issue that is a core element I have observed in my long career – good governance, and the importance of equality and including a range of voices to its achievement. I'd like to spend some time talking through why and how these matters with you this morning.

I stand before you as one of only two female Presidents of the Australian Senate over the past 120 years. What drives me are my values of equality, fairness, and feminism - values that I have embodied throughout my career and especially in leadership positions I've held.

My first unintended lesson in equality was taught to me by my grandmother who always gave my brother more pocket money than me. When I protested this unfairness, Nana always responded that he got more because he was a “boy.” There was no other explanation offered.

The other lesson she inadvertently taught me was about fairness. We often had prunes and custard as a dessert. And again, my brother always got more prunes than me! Of course, I would loudly protest this unfairness to my grandmother and got a similar response to the pocket money story.

It was prunes and pocket money which shaped my career.

In Australia’s Labor Party, the current Government, there must be equal numbers of women and men as candidates for elections. As a result, in the Senate, of which I am President, 56% are women.

Women have always been equally capable of representing our communities. It is the past structures and societal attitudes, such as my grandmothers, that have held us back.

I was pleased to discover that over 30% of Vietnam’s National Assembly are women. It recognises the importance of women's voices and perspectives. It recognises that good leaders are inclusive leaders.

Having diversity in leadership makes a difference to the quality of that decision making.

Women are essential to understanding and engaging with other women, and developing a different appreciation of the needs and wants of the community.

For example, a UN Women examination of 40 peace processes, found that where women were involved, parties were significantly more likely to reach agreement, and that those agreements were more likely to be successfully implemented.

In an age where conflict is spreading challenges are becoming more protracted and multi-dimensional, it matters to have women at the table. It matters when technology is disrupting our world, and it matters when tough decisions about climate and economic policy must be made. If we limit the table to those with one view, we will not reach our full potential.

Companies with more women on their boards are more profitable.

So greater inclusion means greater wealth and cohesion.

And this is relevant to Vietnam because of its highly ambitious goals to reach upper middle-income status by 2030, and high-income status by 2045.

High standards of leadership, and greater levels of inclusion are critical to meeting these objectives.

Increasing the number of women in leadership is not easy - it requires deliberate and planned strategies. We're proud to be supporting the Academy through the Vietnam Australia Centre with its approach to inclusive leadership.

The Australian Government has introduced several approaches to lead and govern our country during these modern challenges, aside from inclusion in leadership.

Australia respects that there are many different forms of governance. We also recognise that we can always improve our approaches.

My role within the Senate is a fundamental part of our democratic governance and the continuous effort towards improvement.

Good governance is about how we equitably make decisions, use resources and hold each other to account. Good governance is critical – whether in government, civil organisations or private sector. Whether national, regional, or local.

As such, it underpins the vision Australia holds of a peaceful, stable and prosperous region.

Good governance enables better government services, improved security and justice. It benefits social stability and economic prosperity and environmental health.

It is important not only for the wellbeing and prosperity of those inside a country or community, but it equips a nation (and its communities) to advocate for its own interests in the global community – to sustain its own development, and to be resilient to external pressure and shocks.

The Australian Government is holding Australia to a higher standard, through a range of domestic and international approaches.

For example, in 2022 we established the National Anti-corruption Commission – it is independent and separate to government. Its role is to enhance the integrity of Australia's public sector by deterring, detecting and preventing corrupt conduct.

In Vietnam, Australia supports the Provincial Accountability and Performance Index, or PAPI, where citizens are surveyed on their level of satisfaction with government service and policy. A great incentive for improvement and with accountability at its heart.

Internationally, Australia's biggest sectoral investment area is in governance (\$1.118bn 2023-24) – whether it be supporting elections, anti-corruption work, strengthening institutions or law and justice services, public financial management or supporting civic organisations.

Underpinning all these investments is a principle of inclusion – to be truly accountable and effective means being inclusive of all those that government affects – regardless of gender, age, location, ability, cultural, social and religious diversity.

Inclusive of needs and challenges, inclusive of voices and ideas, inclusive of contributions and potential.

And that returns us to why including women in leadership and decision making is critical to good governance.

I hope I have made it clear today that there are positive outcomes for us all brought about by ensuring women, and all diverse voices, are integrated into our leadership and governance approaches.

Again, I would like to thank my host here at the Academy – Professor Thang and to the audience and wish you health and happiness.

Thank you